

VZCZCXRO4876  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHAK #6388/01 3131602  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 091602Z NOV 06  
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9895  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL PRIORITY 1612  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE PRIORITY  
RUEKDAI/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 5277  
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY  
RUEHAK/USDAO ANKARA TU PRIORITY  
RUEHTH/USDAO ATHENS GR PRIORITY  
RHMFISS/USNMR SHAPE BE//SA/SACEUR// PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 006388

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SE, USNATO FOR KEMP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/09/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [TU](#) [GR](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY/GREECE: SOLDIERS TAKE THE LEAD IN  
IMPROVING AEGEAN RELATIONS

REF: A. A) IIR 6 898 0376 06

[1](#)B. B) IIR 6 837 0020 07

Classified By: A/DCM Dan Sreebny, reasons 1.4 (b and d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The November 1-4 visit to Athens by Turkey's Chief of General Staff (CHOD) Gen. Yasar Buyukanit, the first such visit in at least 32 years, is the most high-profile of recent firsts in Turkish-Greek military cooperation. Buyukanit reportedly discussed extending Aegean confidence building measures and the creation of new combined Turkish-Greek operational units under NATO. Following the visit, Turkish and Greek air force units participated in a November 6-10 disaster relief exercise in Ankara. Coast Guard chiefs of both countries will also meet in the next few weeks. The high-profile military exchanges come at a time when bilateral political relations remain stalled over EU accession, Cyprus, and disputes over the Halki Seminary and the Muslim minority in Thrace. End Summary.

The Turkish CHOD's "Friendship Attack"

[1](#)2. (C) Gen. Buyukanit's three-day visit to Athens, in which he met with his counterpart, Greek CHOD Admiral Panayiotis Chinoftis as well as Defense Minister Evangelos Meimarakis, reciprocated Chinoftis' first ever Greek chief of staff visit to Ankara on July 27-28. Buyukanit had previously visited Greece in 2005, the first Chief of Turkish Land Forces to do so, a point underscored in laudatory Ankara press accounts of this latest trip, which portrayed a confident and exuberant commander-in-chief quoting Ataturk and praising Greek hospitality. The Turkish press reported positive atmospherics, describing the landmark visit a "friendship attack" on the Greek capital.

[1](#)3. (U) The TGS released a statement listing the topics discussed in Athens, including:

-- evaluation and expansion of already agreed to confidence building measures in the Aegean;

-- creation of a new, joint committee at the Chief of Defense level for the Balkan states which would meet periodically "to promote regional security and discuss military issues." The

first meeting is expected to take place in Thessaloniki in early 2007.

- creation of joint Turkish-Greek operational unit within NATO to participate in peacekeeping operations;
- creation of a Turkish-Greek army unit to participate in NATO Response Force (NRF) operations as needed;
- exchange of personnel in NATO deployed naval units;
- creation of a combined disaster relief/humanitarian aid task force;
- exchange of working visits for armed services commanders;
- exchange visits among personnel serving in Turkish-Greek border units in Thrace;
- illegal immigration; and
- regional security issues related to the Middle East, and Iraq.

#### Low-Key Spin in Ankara

14. (C) Ankara officials have treated the visit in a low-key manner. The MFA Northeast Mediterranean affairs office downplayed the significance of the meetings, painting them as the next incremental step in a gradual process of improvement in Turkish-Greek ties that began as far back as 1999, after the arrest of PKK terrorist leader Abdullah Ocalan and reciprocal humanitarian support following severe earthquakes

ANKARA 00006388 002 OF 002

in both countries. Buyukanit's trip is not likely to hasten scheduling of the visit to Athens later this year by FM Gul, whose potential visit would be in keeping with an agreement to have foreign ministers visit the other country in alternate years.

15. (C) One MFA official familiar with Aegean issues told us he was optimistic that renewed discussion of confidence building measures would decrease chances for accidents involving military vessels and aircraft in disputed waters and air space. An incident in May 2006 involving F-16s from both countries operating in close contact resulted in a mid-air collision and the death of the Greek pilot. "Dogfights" between Turkish and Greek aircraft and close encounters between both nations' naval vessels operating in the Aegean continue. As recently as late October, we viewed video footage reportedly taken by a sailor from the deck of a Greek frigate showing a Turkish F-4 approaching the ship's bow head on and passing very close down the ship's port side approximately 15 feet above the water.

16. (C) On the creation of joint Turkish-Greek units under a NATO framework for peace-keeping or for the NATO Response Force (NRF), an MFA official with responsibility for NATO issues was at a loss to describe to us anything about the proposals. As of November 8, he had not yet seen the official report of the talks from TGS.

17. (C) Ankara observers outside of government point out that Buyukanit's visit did nothing to address the underlying land and sea border dispute issues in the Aegean. Well-known academic on Turkey-Greece relations Huseyin Bagci commented privately to us that Bukuyanit had little choice but to go to Athens after Adm. Chinofotis' visit to Ankara. Nevertheless, the visit did push the ball forward, and was the kind of visit that only a senior military officer of Bukuyanit's stature could pull off because the Turkish public has far more trust in the military than it does in its civilian political leadership not to sell short Turkey's interests, he said. Bilkent Professor Hasan Unal, another knowledgeable

Aegean commentator, suggested to us that reported proposals for the formation of joint military units under a NATO umbrella were the most significant result of the visit.

#### Disaster Relief Exercise and Coast Guard Chiefs Meeting

-----

18. (C) Turkey and Greece Air Force elements conducted their first ever joint natural disaster relief exercise November 6-10 in Ankara. The Greek contribution to the exercise consists of 15 Air Force personnel. A bilateral search and rescue exercise to be held in the Aegean with navy and air force units from both countries, proposed for the same dates (ref a) did not materialize. Greek Coast Guard Chief Vice Admiral Elias Sionides accepted an invitation from his Turkish counterpart, Rear Admiral Can Erenoglu, and the two are expected to meet for the first time in a matter of weeks to discuss coordination on search and rescue operations in the Aegean and the issue of human trafficking (ref b).

#### Comment

-----

19. (C) Buyukanit's visit to Athens stands in stark contrast to the inability of the political leadership on either side of the Aegean to close on the long sought visit of Greek PM Karamanlis to Turkey. Aegean confidence building measures can only help reduce the likelihood of fatal encounters there. We are less optimistic that the joint military units will be easily organized, but the fact that the two sides can consider such cooperation is encouraging. Buyukanit is doing well to support his western flank as Turkey faces increasing challenges to the east.

Visit Ankara's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

WILSON